

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3703

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June 24, 2008

The Honorable James B. Peake
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Peake,

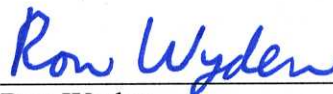
On April 25, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) issued policy Directive 2008-023, which required all Veterans Affairs facilities to develop a comprehensive plan to assist veterans with voter registration. Less than two weeks later on May 5, the VHA replaced this policy with a new directive. While still aimed at assisting veterans with voting and registration, this new policy makes one major change from the original – a prohibition on voter registration drives at VA facilities.

Our nation's veterans have selflessly answered the call to serve, and many have paid a heavy price for their service and now require care at VA facilities. Their ability to register to vote should never be hampered by their need for medical treatment. VA medical centers should serve as a place of civic engagement for some of our most patriotic Americans, not a place where they feel displaced or forgotten. America's democracy rests on the ability of all voters – veterans, soldiers, and civilians alike – to make their voice heard on Election Day.

While the new directive cites the Hatch Act as a prominent reason for this prohibition, the United States Office of Special Counsel has consistently ruled that federal employees may participate in and assist with nonpartisan voter registration drives. A blanket prohibition on all registration drives prevents a potentially valuable resource from reaching these veterans. The very least our country can do is provide them with every convenience and resource available to cast their ballots on Election Day.

There is nothing more fundamental than the right to vote. And no one knows this better than the very men and women that have fought to protect the American way of life. I respectfully request this overly broad ban on voter registration drives at VA facilities be reconsidered.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator